

The Messenger



Ascension Lutheran Church, 5730 SE 28th St,
Ocala, FL 34480 Ph: 352-624-0066
On the web at ascensionocala.com

DECEMBER
2023



In this issue

- 1 Pastor's Corner
- 2 Council President;
New Members
- 3 Date of Christmas
- 4 St. Nicholas
- 5 Silent Night
- 6 Twelve Days of
Christmas
- 7 From the Office
- 8 Scriptures
- 9 Birthdays
- 10 Calendar

This issue of the
Messenger is
sponsored by
The Cross Eyed
Buffalo Bar



The above is how most Christmas package tags read. Even though we may be personally handing someone the gift, we feel we need that tag. I think the angels who greeted the shepherds that first Christmas would appreciate the custom. They said to them, "To you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the **Lord.**" (Luke 2:11)

This baby comes to you and to me. He comes to all people. He is gift from God! He is the Messiah that God promised long ago. He comes to save a planet. He comes to bring new hope, peace, joy, and love.

There are many traditions and customs surrounding the celebration of Jesus' birth. In this Newsletter we have mentioned and explained only a few. We hope you will enjoy these! A blessed time of preparation to you this Advent Season! A Hopeful celebration of Christmas! A sense of thankfulness for the gift of a New Year!

In Christ Jesus,
Pastor Chuck



My brothers and sisters in Christ,

We're here in Advent! We made it What an amazing time, as we wait and hope and try to find time amidst all the preparations to reflect on the marvel of Christ come down to Earth.

Your Ascension staff and volunteers are extra busy during this time, preparing end-of-year reports, figuring out next year's budget, looking ahead and planning for a new year in our growing church. (Wasn't it WONDERFUL to welcome so many new members on the first Sunday of Advent?!) So, when you can, remember to say thank you to all who work to make our church so special.

We've already had our first Wednesday service of three this Advent. It was truly fun and meaningful, educational and filled with music...with a yummy meal to boot! We have a talented script writer (Pastor) and thespians from the congregation. I encourage you to come to every service you can this season, including Wednesdays. We all are in need of as much joy as possible.

We wait. We hope. We believe!

Deanne Kells



**Ascension
Welcomes
10 new members!**



Why is Christmas on December 25?



It is very unlikely that Jesus was born on December 25th. The shepherds in the fields with their sheep probably would not have been there if it were winter. Many think Spring might have been the time of the year when Jesus was born.

The birth of Jesus had not been a matter of **great concern for the early Christians who thought Jesus' death and resurrection** were the events that changed the world. It also seems no one was really **aware of when Jesus' birthday was, or if they did, it was not as important as the** crucial events of Holy Week and Easter. Without the Gospel of Luke (Luke 1-2), we would not know about the first Christmas. Without Matthew (Matt.2), those wisemen who followed a star would have been unknown to us. The Gospels of Mark and John do not have the birth events, although John begins his Gospel pondering the wonder of the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us.

In the year 125 A.D. Telesphorus, the second bishop of Rome said that **services should be held to memorialize the "Nativity of our Lord and Savior,"** but no set day was set. The most common day came to be January 6 (which we now observe as Epiphany). In 320, Pope Julius I made December 25 as the day to celebrate the birth of Jesus. The reason for the day is not certain, however in pagan Rome December 25 was a day of celebration of the Sun. Christians may have reclaimed the day and moved it in a new direction by the celebration of the birth of the Son of Righteousness- Jesus!

In 325 A.D. the Roman emperor Constantine declared December 25 as an immovable feast day and although the day has not always been observed as one would hope, December 25 has come to be the date given to remember and celebrate the birth of Jesus, our Lord and Savior.

Hanging Socks, Saint Nicholas and Needs Today

If you lived in an area of the world that experienced the cold of winter, you would have a precious pair of socks if you could afford one, or be fortunate enough to have one knit for you. Often, having one pair was a luxury. So each night you would wash your socks and hang them near the fireplace to dry.

Remember the poem “The Night Before Christmas”? “The stockings were hung by the chimney with care, in hopes that St. Nicholas soon would be there.”

St. Nicholas was a real person who became an Arch Bishop, even though he **was still in his twenty’s. He was born into a wealthy family but God placed on his heart a deep concern for the poor.** Nicholas lived and ministered in what is today a part of Turkey.

One day, while traveling, Nicholas heard of a family with a father and three daughters. They lived in poverty and the father could not see any way that his daughters could be married and escape from poverty, since they needed a dowry for someone to marry them. He considered selling one of his daughters into slavery in order to have funds for a dowry for the other two. In the end, he could not bring himself to do that and prayed that God might come to their aid.

Nicholas heard of the plight of this family. There are different stories of how he did this, but one is that one night he managed to place a gold coin in one of the stockings near the fireplace. The father gave thanks to God for this miracle. One daughter could now be married. Nicholas managed to give the same gift to the other daughters as well.

Today, we call some items we may purchase at Christmas “stocking stuffers”. Often these are “minor gifts” compared to a larger gift, or gifts that we have for loved ones. But maybe Nicholas, all the way back in the third or fourth century, has a good idea.

A pastor in our Conference has a ministry to homeless people, many of them veterans. At Christmas our society is much concerned that everyone has something at Christmas, but then that concern seems to fade a bit in the New Year. Perhaps we could do a sock drive **in the New Year. I’ll be asking our Faith in Action Committee to look at this.** St. Nicholas may just continue his good and Godly ideas into the New Year.





Beloved Hymn Is Over 200 Years Old

In 1816 Joseph Mohr wrote a poem. Two years later, on December 24th, 1818, he gave the poem to organist Franz Gruber requesting that he compose a melody for the poem suitable for 2 solo voices along with the choir and able to be accompanied by guitar. No pressure, but could they sing this at Mass that evening?

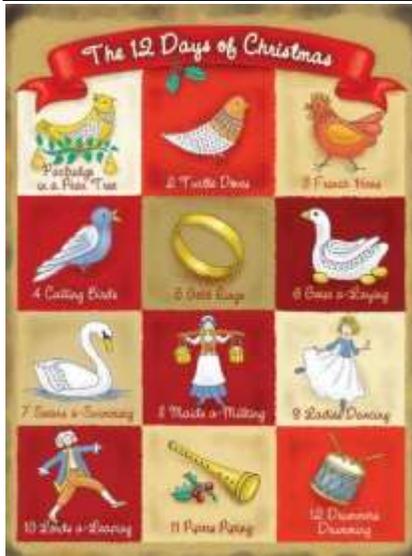
Father Joseph Mohr was the assistant priest at the new parish of St. Nicholas in Oberndorf, which was near Salzburg. Franz Gruber was the parish organist but also a school teacher.

The hymn was used for the first time in the Christmas Eve Mass at St. Nicholas with Fr. Mohr singing tenor and accompanying on guitar. Franz Gruber sang bass. According to the writings of Mr. Gruber, the hymn was met with **“general approval by all”**.

It was a difficult time in Europe following the Napoleonic Wars (1792-1815) and the congregation of mostly shipping laborers and boat builders faced an uncertain future. Yet, on Christmas Eve, these new words and melody invited them to celebrate a holy night, a silent night, and to ponder the birth of their Savior.

Over the past 200 years, there have been other nights of uncertainty for many **people in the world and sometimes, even on a battlefield, the words of “Silent Night” have been sung on Christmas Eve.**

Wherever you are this Christmas Eve, if you attend a Worship Service, chances **are good that this beautiful hymn will be a part of the celebration of Jesus’ birth.**



I think many people hear the song **“The Twelve Days of Christmas”** as a quaint and rather silly song. Usually a radio station will say how much it would cost today to give all the gifts mentioned. That totally misses the real point.

The poem comes out of 15th century England at a time when only the Anglican Church held favor with the King, and other Christian churches were banned. Catholic clergy needed to find a way to instruct their parishioners and The Twelve Days of Christmas was written.

Yes, we too celebrate 12 days of Christmas, all the way to **Epiphany on January 6**. Your neighbors may think it’s weird to keep the outdoor lights on through January 6, but **they may be on the Walmart, Penny’s, Macy’s “calendar”**,

rather than the Church calendar. At one time gifts were given on Epiphany, not Christmas, because we celebrate the coming of the Wise Men on Epiphany (January 6).

So what does the poem mean? **“On the first day of Christmas, my true love gave to me:”** My true love is God. **“A partridge in a pear tree.”** The partridge represents Jesus, because the partridge is the only bird willing to sacrifice her own life to save her young!

“Two Turtle Doves” represents the Old and New Testaments.

“Three French hens” – Faith, Hope Love (1 Corinthians 13)

“Four calling birds” – 4 Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John

“Five gold rings” – the Torah, which is the first 5 books of the Old Testament (The Hebrew Scriptures)

“Six geese a-laying”: the world was created or “hatched” by God in 6 days.

“Seven swans a swimming”- 7 gifts of God the Holy Spirit, prophecy, ministry, teaching, exhortation, giving, leading, and compassion.

“Eight maids a milking” – Being a milk maid was considered a lowly occupation. This represents words from Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount where he says that “happy” or “blessed” are: the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and those who are persecuted for righteousness sake.

“Nine ladies dancing” – The fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

“Ten lords a-leaping” – code for the 10 Commandments

“Eleven pipers piping” – 12 disciples minus one, because of Judas

“Twelve drummers drumming” – 12 points of doctrine in the Apostles’ Creed.

A silly song? Only if we do not know where it came from and why it was composed.

Dear Ascension Family,

Next week will officially mark one year since I started working in the Ascension office. I did not want this milestone to pass without taking the chance to thank Pastor Chuck, the Council, and all of you for allowing me to be part of the office staff.



2022 had many life changes and milestones for me including the move here to Ocala. Through all of the changes God’s guidance was evident and peace was sure. Looking back over the year I marvel at the things God accomplished and I chuckle when I realize how many things from the past have repeated or come to light in the present. Many of these things were lessons my parents taught when I was young. Some were items they had in their home that I kept once they passed.

Finding our dream home here in Ocala was a complete blessing! All homes have a list of projects and things the homeowners want to do. For me, projects at home usually require several trips to the hardware store, long lines for returns, or extra items that I will use one day.

One project was to remove some sections of carpet in the bedroom that were badly stained and the cleaning crew could not remedy. I suddenly had a memory of my father cutting a piece of old carpet and replacing it with a fresh one. If only I had a carpet knife, a remnant of carpet, and some carpet tape.

To my surprise the next thought was a memory on where I had recently seen all of these items in the mountain of moving boxes in the garage. So, I stepped out to the garage and voila! A carpet knife, with a fresh blade. A remnant of carpet that matched the pile of the existing carpet. And a brand new roll of carpet tape still in a sealed box that my father had purchased many years ago and never used. In minutes the stained carpet was removed and the new pieces installed. This project ended with an incredible sense of accomplishment and did not require a trip to the hardware store.

Even though we still have some of the moving boxes in the garage the house definitely feels like home. Susan and I often comment on how much we love Ocala, our home here, and our church family at Ascension. You have been the warm welcome that we needed. Now we look forward with excitement for all that the Lord has in store for us in the coming years.

Rhonda Gonsalves

Daily Scripture Readings for DECEMBER

Fri – Dec 1	Psalms 80:1-7, 17-19	Zechariah 13:1-9	1 Thessalonians 4:1-18	
Sat – Dec 2	Psalms 80:1-7, 17-19	Micah 2:1-13	Matthew 24:15-31	
Sunday – Dec 3	Isaiah 64:1-9	Psalms 80:1-7, 17-19	1 Corinthians 1:3-9	Mark 13:24-37
Mon – Dec 4	Psalms 79	Micah 4:1-5	Revelation 15:1-8	
Tue – Dec 5	Psalms 79	Micah 4:6-13	Revelation 18:1-10	
Wed – Dec 6	Psalms 79	Micah 5:1-5a	Luke 21:34-38	
Thu – Dec 7	Psalms 85:1-2,8-13	Hosea 6:1-6	1 Thessalonians 1:2-10	
Fri – Dec 8	Psalms 85:1-2,8-13	Jeremiah 1:4-10	Acts 11:19-26	
Sat – Dec 9	Psalms 85:1-2,8-13	Ezekiel 36:24-28	Mark 11:27-33	
Sunday – Dec 10	Isaiah 40:1-11	Psalms 85:1-2,8-13	2 Peter 3:8-15a	Mark 1:1-8
Mon – Dec 11	Psalms 27	Isaiah 26:7-15	Acts 2:37-42	
Tue – Dec 12	Psalms 27	Isaiah 4:2-6	Acts 11:1-18	
Wed – Dec 13	Psalms 27	Malachi 2:10-3:1	Luke 1:5-17	
Thu – Dec 14	Psalms 126	Habakkuk 2:1-5	Philippians 3:7-11	
Fri – Dec 15	Psalms 126	Habakkuk 3:2-6	Philippians 3:12-16	
Sat – Dec 16	Psalms 126	Habakkuk 3:13-19	Matthew 21:28-32	
Sunday – Dec 17	Isaiah 64:1-4,8-11	Psalms 126	1 Thessalonians 5:16-24	John 1:6-8,19-28
Mon – Dec 18	Psalms 125	1 Kings 18:1-18	Ephesians 6:10-17	
Tue – Dec 19	Psalms 125	2 Kings 2:9-22	Acts 3:17-4:4	
Wed – Dec 20	Psalms 125	Malachi 3:16-4:6	Mark 9:9-13	
Thu – Dec 21	Psalms 89:1-4,19-26	2 Samuel 6:1-11	Hebrews 1:1-4	
Fri – Dec 22	Psalms 96	Zephaniah 3:8-13	Romans 10:5-13	
Sat – Dec 23	Psalms 96	Zephaniah 3:14-20	Romans 13:11-14	
Sunday – Dec 24	2 Samuel 7:1-11,16	Psalms 89:1-4,19-26	Romans 16:25-27	Luke 1:26-38
	Isaiah 9:2-7	Psalms 96	Titus 2:11-14	Luke 2:1-14[15-20]
Mon – Dec 25	Isaiah 52:7-10	Psalms 98	Hebrews 1:1-4[5-12]	John 1:1-14
Tue – Dec 26	Psalms 148	Jeremiah 26:1-9,12-15	Acts 6:8-15;7:51-60	
Wed – Dec 27	Psalms 148	Exodus 33:18-23	1 John 1:1-19	
Thu – Dec 28	Psalms 148	Jeremiah 31:15-17	Matthew 2:13-18	
Fri – Dec 29	Psalms 148	Isaiah 49:5-15	Matthew 12:46-50	
Sat – Dec 30	Psalms 148	Proverbs 9:1-12	2 Peter 3:8-13	
Sunday – Dec 31	Isaiah 61:10-62:3	Psalms 148	Galatians 4:4-7	Luke 2:22-40



Celebrations for December

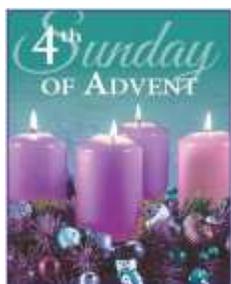
THE MESSENGER
ASCENSION LUTHERAN CHURCH



- 12/04 Jack Richardson
- 12/04 Trinity Kurtz
- 12/10 Ruth Pozo
- 12/12 Eddie McCallon
- 12/22 Raelynn Bishop
- 12/25 Jesus



November and December Birthday Celebration!



Join us as we celebrate the 4th Sunday of Advent on Wednesday, Dec 20th with a focus on Mary. We will share a meal in the Parish Life Building at 5:30pm followed by service at 6:30pm.



Our Christmas Eve Service on Sunday December 24th at 6:00pm will be a celebration with carols, scripture, video, Holy Communion, and a special story for the kids. All are welcome!



Give thanks to God for the gift of 2023 and ask for God's blessing for 2024 at our service on Sunday Dec 31st at 10:30am.

DECEMBER 2023

un	Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat
					1	2
3 First Sunday of Advent 10:30am—Worship with Holy Communion	4 5:30pm—AA	5	6 9:00 am—Quilting <i>Advent Meal 5:30 Service 6:30</i>	7	8	9 <i>Ocala Christmas Parade</i>
10 Second Sunday of Advent 10:30am—Worship with Holy Communion <i>Council meeting after</i>	11 5:30pm—AA	12	13 9:00 am—Quilting <i>Advent Meal 5:30 Service 6:30</i>	14	15	16
17 Third Sunday of Advent 10:30am—Worship with Holy Communion	18 5:30pm—AA	19	20 9:00 am—Quilting Fourth Sunday of Advent <i>Advent Meal 5:30 Service 6:30</i>	21 <i>Thanksgiving Day</i>	22	23
24 Nativity of Our Lord 6:00pm—Worship with Holy Communion	25 5:30pm—AA	26	27 9:00 am—Quilting	28	29	30
31 First Sunday of Christmas 10:30am—Worship with Holy Communion						